



Latrobe Valley Naturalist

September – October 2020

Issue No. 609

Print ISSN 2208-4363
Online ISSN 2208-4371

Office bearers

President: David Stickney
Secretary: Rose Mildenhall
Treasurer: David Mules
Publicity Officer: Alix Williams
Magazine editor: Tamara Leitch
Conservation Coordinator: Denis Nagle
Archivist: Marja Bouman
Webmaster: John Sunderland

Contact

The Secretary
Latrobe Valley Field
Naturalists Club Inc.
P.O. Box 1205
Morwell VIC 3840
info@lvfieldnats.org
0428 422 461

Website

www.lvfieldnats.org

General meetings

Held at 7:30 pm on the
fourth Friday of each month
at the Newborough Uniting
Church, Old Sale Road
Newborough VIC 3825



Shiny Swamp-mat *Selliera radicans* flowering at Wonthaggi Heathlands during the Club's summer camp in February 2020 (Photo: Tamara Leitch).

Upcoming events

Due to government restrictions imposed to control the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus, all LVFNC general meetings have been cancelled until further notice. The following outdoor excursions are currently proposed to be run in accordance with social gathering limits – leaders will cap numbers at the maximum allowed, so bookings are essential.

Botany Group: Saturday 31 October – Yarragon South (contact Wendy)

Bird Group: Tuesday 3 November (Cup Day) – Walkerville (contact Joelle)

November general excursion: Saturday 28 November – Dutson Downs (TBC)

Bird Group: Tuesday 1 December – Hazelwood Wetlands off Strzelecki Hwy (TBC)

Bird Challenge Count: 3-6 December

Christmas Party: Saturday 12 December at David & Marlene's place (TBC)

Club Summer Camp at Lake Tyers: 5-9 February 2021

Rockpooling at Cape Paterson – Sunday morning

Margaret Rowe led an excellent excursion on the rock platform beside the Cape Paterson Bay Beach boat ramp. We were all given a sheet which showed the species we may see, prepared from Margaret's own photos. As Margaret only uses the scientific names, to help the amateurs she'd gone to the trouble of looking up common names to include on the sheet. Margaret asked us to remain close together and share our findings with each other. Any rock that was turned had to be replaced, taking care not to squash any of the animals that were under the rock. We were advised that, generally, animals that cling firmly to rocks cannot be removed without injuring them.



Southern Chiton (Photo: Tamara Leitch)

Starting closest to the shore, we saw barnacles, limpets and various snails, often empty shells. The Six-plated Barnacle *Chthamalus antennatus* grows singly, whereas the Honeycomb Barnacles *Chamaesipho tasmanica* grow side by side in colonies. I had four limpet-type species identified for me – shallow conical shells that were firmly stuck to the rocks. Van Diemen's Siphon Shell *Siphonaria diemenensis* (which is a false limpet) is common close to the shore. The Leathery Sea Slug *Onchidella nigricans* looks a bit like a limpet but is soft and slimy to touch. Small Blue Periwinkles *Austrolittorina unifasciata* were dotted on the rocks in large

numbers in some places – these are painful to walk on in bare feet I've found in the past. Black Nerite *Nerita atramentosa* was fairly common. It's an almost spherical shiny black snail with a white surface underneath. A larger spherical shell I found with green, cream and brown stripes in a spiral pattern was a Common Warrener *Lunella undulata*. Some of the more elongated shells we saw were types of whelks and winkles.

As we walked further out where the rockpools were deeper, turning over some of the large rocks revealed different creatures. We saw quite a lot of chitons, mostly the Southern Chiton *Ischnochiton australis* which is apparently common. It has an unusual escape mechanism – if the rock it is on is removed from water, it curls up and drops back into the water. The other chiton we saw was the Elongated Chiton *Ischnochiton elongatus*. We were lucky to find a couple of Elephant Snails *Scutus antipodes* too. These large, black-bodied snails only have a small iridescent white oval



Elephant Snail (Photo: Tamara Leitch)



Hairy Stone-crab (Photo: Tamara Leitch)

plate for a shell on their backs creating a striking contrast to the body. A long pink worm we saw was a tube worm which would have had its fragile tube broken when the rock was turned over.

Other creatures we saw were a Hairy Stone-Crab *Lomis hirta*, which was brown and hairy with bright blue antennae, and an Eleven-armed Seastar *Coscinasterias muricata*. It was quite large and had 5 long arms, as well as some small ones which

were re-growing.

So much to learn and try to remember, but with Margaret's help and the sheet she provided I felt I'd made some progress.

Wendy Savage

Screw Creek and Townsend Bluff – Sunday afternoon

The walk started in typical coastal dune vegetation: Coast Tea-tree *Leptospermum laevigatum*, Coast Beard-heath *Leucopogon parviflorus*, White Elderberry *Sambucus gaudichaudiana* that had finished flowering, Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma*, Seaberry Saltbush *Rhagodia candolleana* and Native Raspberry *Rubus parviflorus*. Young Clancy and Mergie were very keen to try the ripe, edible fruits of these bush tucker plants, with mixed success!



Marsh Saltbush (left) and Shrubby Glasswort (Photo: Tamara Leitch)

and it was easy to see the differences. A Black Digger Wasp *Sphex cognatus*, which lives and nests in large colonies 25-35 cm underground and comes out to feed on nectar and catch insects, was busy digging a burrow to deposit its catch for its young to feed on when they hatch. The female digs the burrow and closes the entrance over when she leaves.



John collecting specimen (Photo: Lorraine Norden)

Next was the bridge across Screw Creek, where there was a healthy patch of seagrass bending with the current. I needed a specimen for ID and John P exceeded the call of duty to wallow in the stinking mud, clinging to the Grey Mangroves *Avicennia marina* amidst scurrying semaphore crabs, to delve into Screw Creek and collect a specimen, which subsequently confirmed our thoughts that it was Dwarf Grass-wrack *Zostera muelleri*. My grateful thanks to John. An Australian White Ibis and White-faced Heron fossicked on the riverbank.

Crossing the bridge, we passed an area of sedges and rushes. Eastern Yellow Robin, Superb Fairy-wren and Red-browed Finches frolicked about on the ground amongst the Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella revoluta*, Coast

We arrived at the boardwalk built to protect the saltmarsh vegetation, where we spent some time examining the community of species adapted to saline conditions. Coast Spear-grass *Austrostipa stipoides* and Marsh Saltbush *Atriplex paludosa* (rare in Victoria, but locally common here) dominated the landscape, a special find being the tall yellow-flowered spikes of Salt Lawrencia *Lawrencia spicata*, with Shrubby Glasswort *Tecticornia arbuscula* and Yellow Sea-lavender *Limonium australe* dotted about. We compared the salt-tolerant grasses Prickly Couch *Zoysia macrantha* and Salt grass *Distichlis distichophylla* as they were growing together



Digger Wasp (Photo: Tamara Leitch)

Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma gladiatum* and Knobby Club-sedge *Ficinia nodosa*. Coast She-oak *Allocasuarina verticillata*, Coast Banksia *Banksia integrifolia* and some Gippsland Bog Gum *Eucalyptus kitsoniana* dotted the hillside, with Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia* in thickets as we rose to some lovely views from Townsend Bluff, looking back over the mouth of Screw Creek towards Inverloch township and over Anderson Inlet to Point Smythe. Red Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Silvereyes were seen. Townsend Bluff is composed of ~200 million-year-old Jurassic mudstone. Rounding the Bluff, Boobialla *Myoporum insulare* were dripping purple berries and Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* occurred.

The highlight of the return loop track was a huge Coast Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis subsp. pryoriana* dominating the path and begging to be climbed by Clancy and Mergie. From there we headed down to rejoin the original track and cross the bridge back to the cars.

Lorraine Norden

Wonthaggi Heathlands – Monday morning

Terri Allen led us through an interesting variety of habitats. It was a pleasure to see so many of the plants flourishing this summer. A surprising number of species were in bloom; it appeared that some had responded to recent rains, while protection from nearby larger shrubs had encouraged others to flower.



Tall Lobelia (Photo: Margaret Rowe)

As we wandered along the sandy track we admired the bright yellow Swamp Goodenia, Bent Goodenia and Bundled Guinea-Flower, the blue Angled Lobelia and deep blue Tall Lobelia, and the little white flowers of Slender Platysace, Shiny Swamp-mat and Creeping Brookweed. A few bright red flowers were scattered within clumps of Cranberry Heath and we noticed some small shrubs of pale pink Common Heath. Prickly Geebung shrubs looked striking with their prolific golden flowers.



Prickly Geebung (Photo: Margaret Rowe)

On the more exposed dunes, plants in bloom included Silver Banksia, Coast Everlasting, Grass Daisy, Australian Hound's-tongue, and the tiny yellow Thyme Rice-flower. In Victoria, this Rice-flower has an interesting distribution; it grows in sands and is scattered along the entire coastline and also in the far North West.

Some plants were at the stage of seed dispersal. Berries added colour to the vegetation and were the subject of discussion – and some limited experimentation – about whether or not they were edible: deep red berries of Seaberry Saltbush, purple berries of Boobialla, shining blue berries of Black-anther Flax-lily and the small white balls on Coast Beard-heath. The abundant twisted pods of Coast Wattle, and the rich browns and distinctive shapes of sedges and rushes such as Zig-zag Bog-rush, Sea Rush and *Gahnia trifida* added character to



Thyme Rice-flower (Photo: Margaret Rowe)

the vegetation along the edges of the tracks.

Margaret Rowe

Wonthaggi Desalination Plant – Monday afternoon

The Wonthaggi desalination site comprises 225 hectares of rehabilitated farmland, one of the largest ecological restoration projects in Victoria's history, with wetlands and dunes created to block the sight lines of the building and the land revegetated with 3.5 million new plants, including 150,000 trees. Some of this has been successful, other parts less so, with weed incursion seemingly not well-managed.



A carpet of Milky Beauty-heads (Photo: Lorraine Norden)

There are 8 km of walking/cycling/horse-riding trails throughout the reserve. We set off past a constructed wetland, home for many species of waterbird. Coast Wattles *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *sophorae* were covered in galls and looking most unhealthy. The ground was covered with attractive flowering Milky Beauty-heads *Calocephalus lacteus*. We then crossed the road and headed towards a viewing deck over another small wetland, overgrown with vegetation. A couple of specimens of *Disa bracteata*, an introduced South African orchid, were located and dug up. This 'bastard' orchid (Terri's name) produces millions of wind-blown seeds

and has successfully dispersed across the continent from western Australia, where it was first found, and it is now widespread in our area, despite many diligent hours of removal.

From there we walked through some lovely woodland species, with wattles, Coast Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *pyroriana* and Swamp Gum *E. ovata* thriving, creating excellent habitat for honeyeaters and other small birds. A Swamp Harrier over the dunes was a highlight.

The bird hide was a side trip from the path but not a fruitful one as the wetland it overlooked had also become overgrown with vegetation. The path was lined with thistles and other weeds and was not inviting, although White-fronted Chats were seen in the low vegetation.

Back on the main path we attempted a short-cut across to the road and back to the cars. It meant crossing a ditch that proved a little too wide and deep to navigate, so the intrepid Dr Livingstones in the group led the way, bush-bashing a path until they found a more manageable crossing back to the road. It was my fault as it seemed so easy and straightforward last time I did it! Fortunately, we all crossed safely and headed back to the cars, where Alison produced much appreciated cakes for afternoon tea. A lovely way to finish off a well-organised and successful summer camp.

Lorraine Norden



Disa bracteata (Photo: Tamara Leitch)

A bird list for the Cape Paterson camp is available in Appendix I of the electronic version of this Naturalist.

The Very Hungry Tiger Snake

We have a pair of resident Grey Shrike-thrushes in our garden and they have nested in our shed for many years. This year they decided to nest under our verandah in our peg basket. It was suspended from the rope which moves our clothesline up and down. The rope is wound around a verandah post. The peg basket is quite deep so the birds were well below the rim when sitting, despite having built a substantial nest of bark strips and little sticks.

Three lovely cream eggs with brown and gold speckles were laid just when we had our grandchildren staying in the January holidays. I'd allow them a quick look when the parents were not around.

All the eggs hatched around 6th February and the young birds kept their parents very busy bringing them a continuous supply of food. Just as they were getting to a good size, disaster struck on 23rd February. We were lunching outside with family when my daughter spotted a tiger snake stretching down from the house roof towards the nest. We rushed onto the verandah and I grabbed a broom and thumped the roof from below thinking that would send the snake packing. Not so. In no time it squeezed between the guttering and the fascia board and got its head into the nest. With lots of yelling on my part to 'do something!' Ken got the broom and heaved the snake, birds and peg basket up into space and they all landed on a grassy garden path. The snake recovered quickly and headed towards the baby birds. I got the broom and pushed it away and put the babies back in the peg basket, but the snake had already bitten one and it was dead. Of course the parents were going beserk all this time, flying around and making their hissing alarm calls.

We threw the dead bird down so the snake could have it and hopefully leave the others alone. Soon the snake reappeared and slithered around in the garden bed, but didn't come and find the bird, so Ken threw it across to where the snake was. Instantly it seized the bird and proceeded to try and swallow it. This was a long process as it could get the head in easily enough but the body was about twice the diameter of the snake's body, and a quick Google search told me that a snake can really only swallow something about the same diameter as it is. I had seen this tiger snake a number of times in our garden this summer and it was a medium size, about 70 cm long.



Lewie with two eggs in peg basket (Photo: Wendy Savage)



Tiger snake attempting to swallow Shrike-thrush chick (Photo: Steb Fisher)

It persisted with trying to swallow the bird for over an hour, constantly dragging it backwards and moving around through the garden bed and lawn. This gave our neighbour time to come up and get great photos with his fancy camera.

Throughout this whole process the snake seemed to have no interest in – or fear of – us. It was wholly focused on getting its meal. After an hour I gave up watching it, but soon after when I looked, the dead bird was on the grass with no sign of the snake. However, after a short while, the parents were going berserk again and the snake was now in the large japonica bush by the verandah trying to get back to the nest. This wasn't successful as the branches weren't close enough so eventually it went back to the ground and disappeared.

I spent the next hour or so gardening, and as I walked back to the house just after 6 pm, I could hear the Grey Shrike-thrushes going crazy again. It must have taken all that time for the snake to get back up on the roof and it had gotten down to the nest again and had a second baby in its mouth. The problem was it couldn't get back onto the roof through the small space between the guttering and the fascia board, and possibly the bird was too heavy for it to carry upwards anyway. Neither could it get down to the ground as there was nothing to grip onto on the post and clearly it was too big a drop.

It spent about 20 minutes lifting itself up and down, trying either side of the peg basket, putting the bird back into the basket then bringing it out again. It would extend as far down as possible just hanging on by the tip of its tail, then coil right back up again. Eventually it dropped the bird on the verandah and left via the roof. I imagined that it had killed both chicks, but to my relief the last one was untouched.

We moved the peg basket about 1.5 m away into the centre of the clothesline and away from any rafters. We should have done that before, but I was concerned that the parents would abandon the nest if we interfered with it. They didn't, and the next day I could watch them coming in and out feeding their last baby. It grew quickly once it got all the food and left the nest 6 days later. I didn't see it fledge and neither did I see it in the garden, although I thought I may have heard it begging for food a couple of times. They make an annoying, monotonous 'peep peep' which would drive me mad if I was their parent. To my surprise and pleasure, a month later we had a good view of it when we were having our afternoon cuppa on the front verandah. A parent was foraging quite close to us, and the well-grown baby with its speckled front popped out from a garden bed to be fed.

My lesson from all this is not to interfere with nature. If we'd let the snake take the first bird from the nest it may have realised that the meal was too big and not come back for a second. I think when it tried to eat the first bird it may not have connected it with the one it had tried to take from the nest, seeing as the bird was thrown to it when it was on the ground. But who knows? Maybe it would have come for all three if we hadn't eventually moved the nest, and at least we did save one bird.

Wendy Savage



The snake with the second chick (Photo: Wendy Savage)

A welcome garden visitor

A delightful visitor to our rear garden in Traralgon East early in March was a Rufous Fantail. Such visits are doubly welcome whilst we are basically restricted to our own gardens for experiences of nature. After Gill sighted the very active bird, it stayed around long enough for me to fetch my camera and capture this photo of it perched on the edge of a raised vegie patch.



In *The Australian Bird Guide*, Menkhorst *et al* note that the species “typically inhabits moist, shaded understorey in wetter eucalypt forest and rainforest” but that “individuals on passage may occur in atypical habitats (e.g. urban areas).” It is noted as strongly migratory, mostly absent from SE Australia from autumn to spring, wintering in the Far North Queensland region.

Philip Rayment

Nature of West Gippsland

Peter Ware, a member of LVFNC and birdo extraordinaire, has a new blog site called “Nature of West Gippsland” that can be accessed via <https://natureofwestgippsland.blogspot.com/>



You can just look at the blogs when you remember to check, however the best way to keep abreast of the posts is to click on the ‘Subscribe’ button and follow the directions. This will mean you get an email each time a new post happens. That is the only email you get – no advertising etc. The images come with the email and can be opened, downloaded and saved separately if desired. Comments can be added by connecting to the blog post link (the heading in the email) and clicking on the ‘Comments’ button at the end of the post.

Alix Williams

Vale Bruce Adams

Many members of our Club have reflected on their connections with Bruce Adams, who passed away on Thursday 8th October at the age of 88 years. He had been in the care of the staff at Margery Cole Aged Care for some three years. It is one of the more regrettable consequences of the coronavirus pandemic that Estelle and their daughter Louise had been limited in the time that they could be with Bruce during much of 2020, despite their great dedication to his care.

Bruce's contributions to the LVFNC were considerable. He served as our most capable treasurer for 8 years, from 1997 to 2005, assisted by his background as an accountant. His input at our business meetings over many years was highly valued, and he kept us on the straight and narrow in matters relating to incorporation which were often rather perplexing!

Beyond that, Bruce shared Estelle's keen interest and delight in the natural world, and loved sharing his knowledge, enthusiasm and reflections with many people in our Club and in the Sale & District FNC, of which they were also members. They both cherished their time at VFNCA and SEANA camps over the years, and made many friends with naturalists across Australia through their participation in Australian Naturalists Network Get-togethers from their instigation in the year 2000 through to 2012. Estelle relates their fond memories of thereby getting to explore such areas as Darwin, Perth, Chinchilla (in Queensland) and the Victorian High Country with knowledgeable locals.

The Club extends its condolences to Estelle and Louise.

Philip Rayment

Latrobe Valley Naturalist is the official publication of the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club Inc. The Club subscription includes the "Naturalist".

Brief contributions and short articles on any aspect of natural history are invited from members of all clubs. Articles, including those covering Club speakers and excursions, would typically be around one A4 side in length, should not exceed 1,000 words, and may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Photos should be sent as an attachment and be a maximum of 1 megabyte in size.

Responsibility for the accuracy of information and opinions expressed in this magazine rests with the author of the article.

Contributions should
be addressed to:

Ms Tamara Leitch
The Editor
LVFNC Inc.
PO Box 839
TRARALGON VIC 3844

Phone: 0438 372 186

Email: tleitch@wideband.net.au

Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club Incorporation No. A0005323T
ISSN 1030-5084 ABN 86 752 280 972

The Naturalist is generously printed by the office of Russell Northe MLA, Member for Morwell

APPENDIX I – Bird list for Cape Paterson summer camp (D. Mules)

Mahers Landing 01.02.2020

Australian Magpie	Grey Butcherbird	Superb Fairywren
Australian White Ibis	Little Pied Cormorant	Welcome Swallow
Black Swan	Magpie-lark	White-faced Heron
Black-shouldered Kite	Pacific Gull	White-plumed Honeyeater
Common Myna	Red Wattlebird	
European Goldfinch	Silver Gull	

Bald Hills Creek Wildlife Reserve 01.02.2020

Australasian Darter	Eastern Yellow Robin	Magpie-lark
Australian Reed-warbler	Eurasian Coot	Masked Lapwing
Australian Wood Duck	Freckled Duck	Mistletoebird
Black Swan	Great Cormorant	Olive Whistler
Brown Thornbill	Grey Butcherbird	Purple Swamphen
Brown-headed	Grey Fantail	Silvereye
Honeyeater	Grey Shrikethrush	Superb Fairywren
Chestnut Teal	Grey Teal	White-browed Scrubwren
Common Myna	Hoary-headed Grebe	White-eared Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella	Laughing Kookaburra	White-naped Honeyeater
Dusky Moorhen	Little Black Cormorant	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Eastern Whipbird	Little Raven	

Powlett River 01.02.2020

Australian Magpie	Common Myna	Red Wattlebird
Black Swan	Grey Fantail	Silver Gull
Blue-winged Parrot	Masked Lapwing	Silvereye
Chestnut Teal	New Holland Honeyeater	Superb Fairywren

Cape Paterson Boat Ramp 02.02.2020

Australasian Gannet	Little Raven	Red Wattlebird
Australian White Ibis	Little Wattlebird	Silver Gull
Eastern Yellow Robin	Pacific Gull	Silvereye
Great Cormorant	Pied Cormorant	Sooty Oystercatcher
Little Pied Cormorant	Rainbow Lorikeet	White-faced Heron

Baxters Wetland, Wonthaggi 02.02.2020

Australian Shoveler	Freckled Duck	Pacific Black Duck
Black Swan	Grey Fantail	Silvereye
Blue-billed Duck	Grey Shrike-thrush	Spotted Dove
Chestnut Teal	Grey Teal	White-eared Honeyeater
Common Myna	Hardhead	White-faced Heron
Common Starling	Hoary-headed Grebe	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Eastern Yellow Robin	Little Black Cormorant	
Eurasian Coot	New Holland Honeyeater	

Wonthaggi Heathlands 03.02.2020

Australasian Gannet	Little Black Cormorant	Silvereye
Australian Magpie	Little Raven	Superb Fairywren
Common Blackbird	Little Wattlebird	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Common Bronzewing	New Holland Honeyeater	White-browed Scrubwren
Eastern Rosella	Pacific Gull	White-winged Triller
European Goldfinch	Red Wattlebird	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Grey Fantail	Short-tailed Shearwater	
Hooded Plover	Silver Gull	

Rifle Range, Wonthaggi 03.02.2020

Australian Magpie	Little Raven	Superb Fairywren
Chestnut Teal	Masked Lapwing	Swamp Harrier
Common Blackbird	Pacific Black Duck	Welcome Swallow
Common Myna	Purple Swamphen	White-faced Heron
Grey Fantail	Silvereye	Yellow-faced Honeyeater

Skip Lane, Dalyston 03.02.2020

Australian Pelican	European Goldfinch	Magpie-lark
Australian White Ibis	Great Cormorant	Masked Lapwing
Black Swan	House Sparrow	Purple Swamphen
Eurasian Coot	Little Black Cormorant	Royal Spoonbill
Eurasian Skylark	Little Pied Cormorant	